Pope Leo Urges Openness Toward Muslims; Critics Warn Against ‘Naïve’ Expectations

Jordan Blake December 4, 2025

(Vatican Media)

Pope Leo XIV used his recent visit to Türkiye and Lebanon to encourage Christians to embrace a spirit of confidence and openness in their relationships with Muslims, urging the faithful to resist fear-based narratives and to witness to the Gospel through dialogue.

During an interfaith gathering at Martyrs’ Square in Beirut, the Pope reflected on the unique religious landscape of Lebanon, where Christian churches and Muslim mosques stand side by side. He noted that this coexistence offers a visible reminder of the shared longing for God that marks the people of the region.

“Dear friends, your presence here today, in this extraordinary place where minarets and bell towers stand side by side, yet both soar toward the heavens, testifies to the enduring faith of this land and the persistent dedication of its people to the one God,” he said, according to LifeSiteNews. The Pope added that in this environment, “may every bell toll, every adhān, every call to prayer blend into a single, soaring hymn… to lift a heartfelt prayer for the divine gift of peace.”

In remarks to reporters on his return flight to Rome, Pope Leo addressed concerns expressed in Europe and North America about Islamic influence and the preservation of Christian identity. He acknowledged that tensions and fears certainly exist but warned that these anxieties are often fueled by political agendas rather than by genuine encounters with Muslim communities.

“I know that in Europe there are many times fears that are present but oftentimes generated by people who are against immigration and trying to keep out people who may be from another country, another religion, another race,” the Pope said, according to LifeSiteNews. Throughout his interactions in Türkiye and Lebanon, he emphasized that

discussions "were precisely concentrated on the topic of peace and respect for people of different religions."

Pope Leo underscored that Lebanon, despite its history of conflict, offers the world a valuable model of coexistence. "I think one of the great lessons that Lebanon can teach to the world is precisely showing a land where Islam and Christianity are both present and are respected and that there is a possibility to live together to be friends," he stated. He urged Western nations to "be a little less fearful and look for ways of promoting authentic dialogue and respect."

Not all Church leaders share the Pope's perspective. According to LifeSiteNews, Bishop Marian Eleganti expressed concern that the Holy Father's comments underestimate the serious theological differences between Christianity and Islam. Pointing to the Islamic teaching that God has no Son, the bishop argued that "where is the same God? It is impossible – it is such a contradiction," and warned that the Pope's optimism reflects "a naïve relationship with Islam."

Eleganti also referenced Scripture, invoking Psalm 95 to caution that Christians must be discerning in how they understand other religions. His comments come amid ongoing reports of Christian persecution in parts of the world where Islamic extremism holds influence. According to LifeSiteNews' reporting on the OpenDoors World Watch List, Islamic oppression remains the leading driver of Christian persecution in thirty-one of the fifty most affected countries.

As Pope Leo returns to Rome, the conversation he has sparked continues across the Catholic world. His call to "work together" and to highlight "the possibility that dialogue and friendship between Muslims and Christians is possible" invites Catholics to consider how they might pursue peace without overlooking the challenges faced by believers in regions where religious coexistence is fragile.